

## The Pain of a Family Divided

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As the world's attention has been absorbed by continuous conflict and suffering in the Middle East, UPF Israel held a conference on Human Rights, Peace and Security on September 9 in Jerusalem. Most of the speakers focused on local conflicts and on remembering the devastation of the Holocaust during World War II. However, I was invited to speak on the conference theme in relation to the situation on the Korean Peninsula. The conference was held in the culture center of a synagogue, with participants mostly from academic and religious circles. Among the various speakers, the comment of a young rabbi struck me. "Now the tension in the Middle East is heating up again," he said. "We are still fighting the same battle we have fought for sixty years. Maybe even longer; actually, the struggle began in Adam's family. How many years has it been going on? How many years do we have to continue this fight?" He raised the very issue that I wanted to

highlight.

I had chosen to focus on the plight of the hundreds of thousands of families that were separated when the Korean War compounded the division that had occurred on the Korean Peninsula through the establishment of separate North Korean and South Korean governments. The people who were separated from their family members so long ago could not imagine that they would never meet their loved ones again. However, that remains the painful reality, even though more than sixty years have passed. I had prepared a PowerPoint presentation with photographs of the Korean War, showing how refugees had to flee their homes in North Korea, often leaving behind family members for many different reasons. Once the border was fixed after the war, there was no communication between these people until, after fifty years, the two governments allowed selected families to meet. The photographs of those first meetings are touching. When I showed photos of parents and children, brothers and sisters meeting for the first time in fifty years, I heard sobbing in the audience. It was clear that the issue of divided families has universal appeal.

On a fundamental level, it is the reality we all share, as a divided human family. "Now is the time to open our eyes, to see one another as brothers and sisters," I told the audience. "We are truly family members that have been separated for so long. We have forgotten our parents' faces, our brothers' and sisters' names and faces. We have become "strangers" and "others." We have fought and killed one another. Now is the time to realize the truth that we are all brothers and sisters. You are my long-lost brothers and sisters, whom I am meeting for the first time after six thousand years. I am so glad to see you." This statement brought loud applause from the audience; it was the first time I have received such warm response to a speech. The meeting ended with hugs and warm greetings all round. God bless Israel!

Afterward, I was reflecting on the unique position of our central blessed families. We are the first generation to understand the nature of original human beings, original human relationships and the original world. We long for that original, God-given nature, and we are trying hard to build that original world, in which we can live together happily, without struggle. Because of our unique understanding, we have a unique ability to move people. It is interesting that whenever we approach people with this original mind and heart, they immediately feel it and want to share it with us. As long as we keep this mind and heart, God will surely be with us. Let us work together to expand the blessing to all families, for this is the only way to finally put an end to the conflicts, suffering and divisions that bring so much pain to our world. Heaven will certainly bless those whose hearts yearn for the original human being, the original human relationship and the original human world.